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Without Struggle

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Abstract

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DR. REMINGTON left the quiet whiteness of the operating room behind him and opened the door of his office in the hospital.

Laura jumped to her feet as he entered the room. "Will Ted be all right, doctor?" Her voice was urgent, and her eyes pleaded for reassuring words. She put both hands to her hairline and pushed her tense fingers thru her hair, as though she were trying to press out of her mind the memories of the accident.

Dr. Remington's eyes were tired and worried beneath his bushy white eyebrows. "Let's forget about Ted for awhile, and take a look at you." He moved Laura gently to a chair. The girl was tall and slight, and as she walked, she seemed to think twice about each step. "Everything seems so unreal . . . like a nightmare I can't awake from." Her body was rigid, but her fingers were moving nervously, twisting the diamond ring on her left hand. "But why can't I see Ted?" Her short dark hair curled softly around her face . . . a face like that of a child asking the impossible.

Dr. Remington ignored her pleading. The shock of the accident had weakened her nerves . . . it was wise to delay the truth about Ted's condition. His hands moved quickly and surely as he cleaned the gash on Laura's forehead. "You were lucky in escaping serious injury, Laura . . . it won't be necessary to take stitches in this cut."

Laura started to say something about a reward for living right, but her words ended abruptly . . . as though she suddenly wondered if she had been living right. "Ted will be all right, won't he, doctor?" She waited for the doctor's answer, but closed her ears to anything he might say. She was afraid to hear anything but the words she wanted to hear.

Just then, the door opened again, and like a gust of a small tornado, a buxom, well-dressed woman swept in, followed by her husband.

"Hello, Mrs. Davis . . . were you able to locate the boy's parents?" The woman paid no attention to Dr. Remington, but swooped down on her daughter like a mother hen over its only chick. "Baby, are you all right? Your forehead! It's bleeding . . . Doctor, will it leave a permanent scar?" She didn't wait for his answer, but continued to fire questions at the girl about the accident . . . how fast was Ted driving, had he been drinking, where had they been until such an hour . . .

Laura seemed helpless and inert as she answered her mother, "Mother, I don't know . . . I just don't know. We were driving home from the dance . . . the windshields were partly frozen over, and we missed a curve. All I can remember is that awful screech of brakes, the crash—and then Ted pinned under that damn steering wheel."

Mrs. Davis raised her eyebrows at the word, "damn," but let Laura continue. "Maybe we were going too fast . . . I don't know." Her voice rose steadily, and then broke . . . her head dropped to her lap and her slim body shook as she sobbed silently. Dr. Remington saw beyond his medical profession and realized that the girl needed something more than medicine could give her . . . but . . . he was neither the mother nor the father, merely the family doctor.

"I think you'd better leave her here tonight . . ." Dr. Remington told her parents. "She's all right, but the shock was great . . . she'll need a sedative."

"How is the boy?" Mr. Davis asked the doctor as he walked to the outer door of the hospital with them.

"He's suffering from a severe concussion, and internal complications. We've done everything possible, but . . . I'm afraid that isn't enough."

"You mean Ted may DIE?" Mrs. Davis spoke of death as if it were something only the sinful participated in. "But the wedding. . . ."

Dr. Remington remembered the announcement in the paper. December twenty-first . . . ten days . . . he hadn't realized it was so soon. Also, he remembered another announcement some time ago . . . same girl, same boy. "They had planned to get married last year too, hadn't they?"

"Oh yes, but that was ridiculous . . . Ted had a year

of college left then, and his money on the G. I. bill would never had kept Laura happy."

"Ridiculous?" The doctor thought to himself, "Is marriage ever ridiculous when two people are in love?" Aloud, he fought for his cause, "But Laura has been working, hasn't she?"

"Oh yes . . . she graduated two years ago. They would have had enough to live on, but Laura is used to more than just living."

As the couple walked down the steps toward their car, the doctor stood in the doorway thinking . . . about the boy on third floor who was dying, and about Mrs. Davis's interpretation of the word *living*. He thought, also, of Laura . . . her weakness was not just a condition of shock; it was something which had begun a long time ago.

It was less than a month after Ted's funeral that Dr. Remington saw Laura again. Mrs. Davis had called in the morning saying that she was sending Laura in for a check-up.

"I don't know what's wrong with her . . . she still walks around in a trance." Mrs. Davis seemed concerned.

"Isn't that only natural, Mrs. Davis . . ." the doctor asked her, "Laura has been under a great strain."

"Yes, but not once has she broken down and cried since that night in the hospital . . . she lies awake nights, and refuses to eat."

When Laura walked into Doctor Remington's office that afternoon, he was shocked to see the change that had come over her. Her eyes were the eyes of someone who had seen too much, and they looked now without seeing. There was a puffy quality about her face that bothered him. "Laura, I know that nothing I can say now about Ted will make you feel any better . . ." They weren't easy words for the doctor . . . but Laura didn't seem to be listening. She avoided looking directly at the doctor. "I really don't need an examination, Doctor. Mother just get upset."

"Well, Laura, Mothers often have an intuition that is worth looking into. You haven't been eating regularly—is that right?" Dr. Remington leaned back in his chair. He turned a pencil slowly between his fingers as he studied her

full rounded figure . . . for someone who hadn't been eating, she certainly showed no loss of weight.

"My stomach has been acting up. I can't keep food down very well . . ." Her next words followed too quickly, "But I'm certain that it is just a case of nerves."

"That may be, Laura, and if so, an examination will . . ."

"No, Doctor! I really don't have time . . . I have to . . . ah . . . er . . . Well, it's just that I'm sure that if you'll give me some pills or something for upset stomachs, I'll be all right." She wasn't asking pity . . . she didn't seem even to care about a cure.

"Now Laura, let's not be a little girl . . ." Dr. Remington was reminded of earlier professional visits with Laura. As a child she had given him many a merry chase to avoid vaccinations. The doctor's tightly-set mouth curled into a smile as he recalled the time Laura had measles. He could still remember the horrified look on her young face, and her awed tone, "But Doctor, I can't let you undress me. . . . You're a man!"

"She could use some of that spunk now, that she once had." Dr. Remington told himself as he studied the quiet girl sitting before him. He didn't like the sound of her symptoms, and yet it was possible . . . she had been engaged too long. . . .

A thorough examination confirmed his suspicions. "You are going to have a baby, Laura. . . ." Dr. Remington realized afterwards that his words were too blunt . . . too true. Laura's face flushed, and she stared stoically at the doctor a moment. She rocked her head slowly as if repeating "no" over and over to herself. Her eyes were dry, but she dropped her face into trembling hands, "I had hoped and prayed that it wasn't so. . . ." She looked up suddenly and pleaded, "Isn't there something you can do?"

Dr. Remington's fingers traced his cheek bone as he breathed deeply. He wanted to ask the girl if she realized what she was thinking . . . thinking of killing the only part left living of Ted. He wanted to shake some life and fight into her inert body, but remaining a doctor, he merely shook his head, "No, Laura . . . neither legally nor ethically."

"But what can I do . . . what will they say?"

He didn't know whom she was most afraid to face . . . her parents or society. "Laura, it won't be so bad. I'll talk to your parents. There are homes, good homes, that you can be sent to if you don't want to stay here."

"No! Promise me you won't say anything to my folks . . . I'll tell them, but let me do it my way. . . ." Her eyes were wide and tortured. She reminded him of a wild animal, young and afraid . . . weakened, but not tamed.

Months passed and Dr. Remington didn't see anything more of Laura. But, there was some talk about her leaving town for a rest to get over the shock of Ted's death. He often wondered . . . sometimes worried . . . how had her parents reacted when Laura told them? He almost expected to hear news of Mrs. Davis leaving town for a rest . . . but there was none. Then the protecting blanket of snow melted, the grass began to turn green, birds returned. . . . Spring had come.

Late one evening, Dr. Remington was called to the hospital for an emergency. Heaven and hell both must have been awakened by the cries echoing through the stilled halls of third floor. "Go away! Leave me alone . . . just let me die!" The doctor's footsteps quickened . . . there was something familiar about that voice raised in pain-shaken screams.

A nurse, whose face and arms showed marks of human scratching, met him at the door of the room. "We can't do a thing with her, Doctor . . . she keeps fighting us off." Inside the room, five nurses surrounded the bed. As one of them stepped inside to make room for the doctor, the fighting wildcat was revealed . . . Laura Davis. Fully clothed, she lay kicking and screaming, "I want to die!" Her face was wet with perspiration, and her hair, damp and straight, framed a face twisted with pain. She stopped fighting when she saw Dr. Remington, and relaxed somewhat between intervals of pain. "I couldn't tell them doctor . . . I tried, but I couldn't."

"Give her a hypo, nurse. . . ." Dr. Remington's face clouded as he felt the wild pulsations in her wrist. "I don't understand, Laura . . . whom couldn't you tell?"

"I didn't tell anyone . . . I went away, but my parents thought just for a rest. I don't know why I came back . . . I was scared . . . I just couldn't stay in that strange town." As she spoke, the doctor stared at her body . . . the flatness he saw seemed impossible. Laura's voice was weakening, "Mother thinks that all this . . ." she became tense and doubled up once more, ". . . that these pains are caused by my appendix."

Dr. Remington counted to himself the months since the day Laura had come to his office, and added three more to the four. It wasn't logical that the baby would be arriving this soon. . . nor was it logical that her pregnancy wasn't more apparent. "Nurse, help me get her out of these clothes. . . ."

After Laura's clothes had been removed, they stared at the yards of white tape binding and hiding her figure. "How could she . . . it's suicide!" the young, inexperienced nurse blurted out. Dr. Remington and the other nurses glared as if to say, "Be quiet, you young fool." But Laura had heard.

"I don't care if I die . . . I didn't mean it that way when I first tried to hide my body, but now I want to die . . . and I will." Laura again doubled up with pain.

"Prepare surgery for child birth, and hurry." Dr. Remington's words were quick as he checked his watch after timing Laura's pains.

After reaching surgery, Laura soon went into a delirium. Her words became softer, and more jumbled without making much sense. They were words about Ted . . . calling for him . . . reliving the accident. They were pleading words . . . pleading for another chance to get married . . . pleading for forgiveness.

Dr. Remington worked quietly and swiftly. Above the white mask, his eyes expressed the fight within him, but he was working against the handicaps of time and the desire for death. A few minutes before the birth of her still-born baby, Laura stopped breathing.

A nurse looked up at the doctor, her eyes inquiring. Dr. Remington nodded mechanically as pulled off his rubber gloves. As the sheet was pulled over Laura's lifeless body,

he thought how little life had been drained from her in her last moments . . . and how much life had been torn from her in previous years.

Dr. Remington's feet moved slowly as he left surgery. He thought about the papers to be filled out . . . about the line which read, "Cause of death," and as he walked, he wondered, "How does one put into words a cause which was begun years and years ago. . . ."

—Margery Storby, *H. Ec. Sr.*



THERE'S NO WHY

I imagined myself as nowhere
And while I was there
I looked down
On the clown
That was me.
And it was strange to see
Myself from a distance.
I smiled at the *shoulds* and *should nots*.
I knew there's no why nor any because.
And while knowing the creature I was,
An uneasy smile played about in my mind.
All mortal responses were left far behind.
Laughter came smiling, sheepishly first,
Then gaining momentum, descending, it burst
And I was there
No more nowhere.
My reflection stood outside with nothing below,
I stood before the window.
Smiling, so near—
—We laughed together in fear.

—Richard Watson, *Sci. Fr.*